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Fact vs. fiction U.S. gov't hides *real* jobless crisis

By Jaimeson Champion

The latest Labor Department report, released June 6, disclosed that the U.S. economy lost 49,000 jobs in the month of May, and that the unemployment rate rose to 5.5 percent. The rise in the unemployment rate was the largest monthly increase in 23 years. The report, coupled with a spike in the price of oil to more than \$138 a barrel, helped initiate a stock market freefall, with the Dow losing nearly 400 points on the day.

Since the onset of the current economic crisis, the corporate controlled media outlets have devoted much ink and airtime to the monthly employment reports from the Labor Department. As the economic crisis has deepened by the day, each month has brought a gloomier report.

While the latest Labor Department report is dismal, the actual state of the U.S. labor market is much worse than the report discloses. Most of the "official" labor market gauges are deliberately designed to distort and obscure the actual employment picture. Much of the discussion on the health and direction of the U.S. economy thus begins on false premises.

Here are four of the most propagated myths about the U.S. labor market:

1) The U.S economy has lost 324,000 jobs so far in 2008.

According to the Labor Department's figures, the U.S. economy has suffered five consecutive months of job loss, resulting in a total of 324,000 layoffs this year. In reality, the actual number of jobs lost in 2008 is tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, higher.

The Labor Department's report does not accurately gauge sectors such as construction and service industries, where so many of the recent job losses have been concentrated.

Construction has been hemorrhaging jobs for more than

a year as the housing market has completely collapsed. The hundreds of thousands of undocumented construction workers who have been laid off in the wake of what is the biggest housing market bust in history are not counted in the Labor Department's numbers.

The economic slowdown has also led to the loss of thousands of service sector jobs. In low paid service industries, most U.S.-born and immigrant workers work "under the table." As consumers rein in discretionary spending in the face of higher living costs, thousands of undocumented service sector workers have been laid off by bosses seeking to cut expenses. These laid off workers are also not counted in the Labor Department's figures.

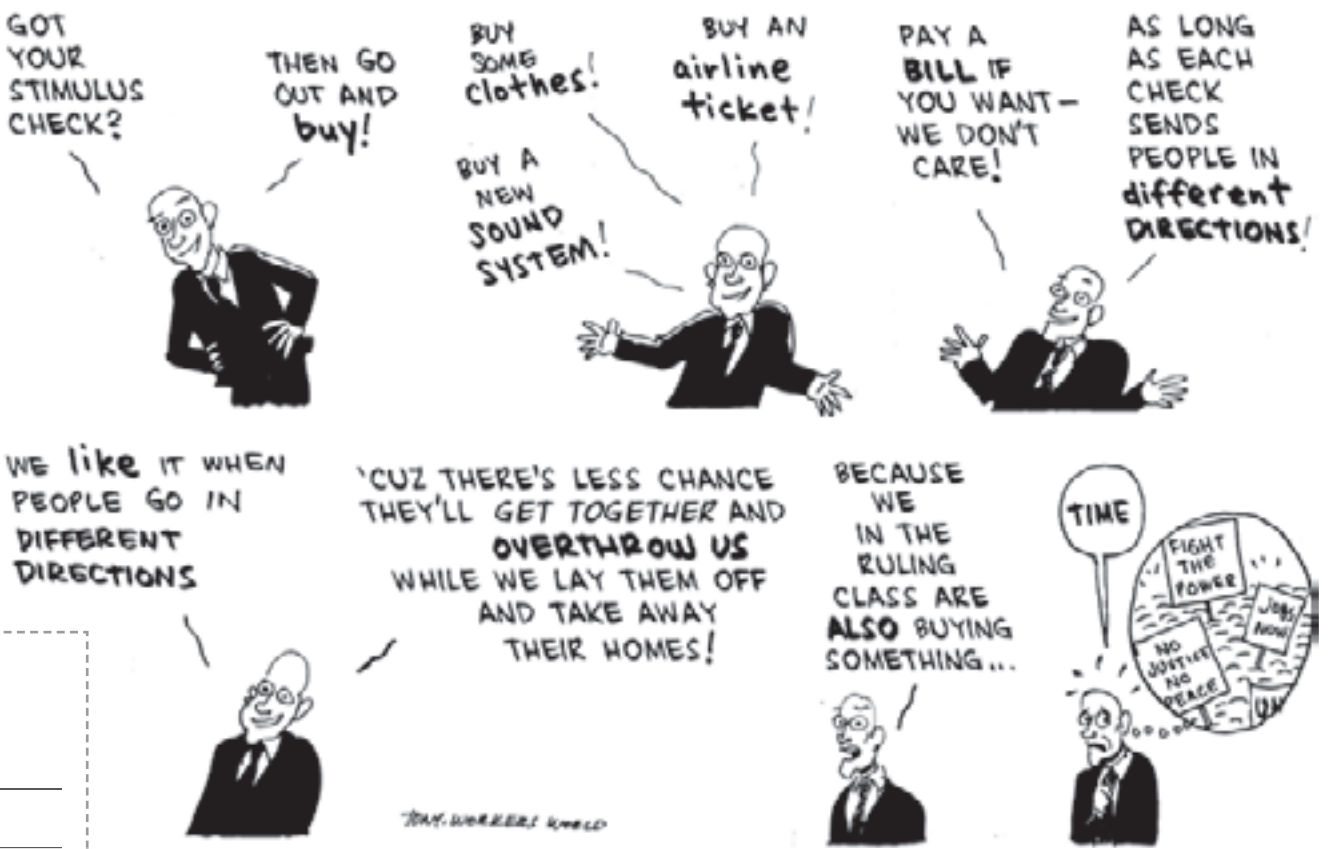
2) The unemployment rate is 5.5 percent.

The Labor Department puts the unemployment rate at 5.5 percent. The actual unemployment rate in the U.S. is much higher. The "official" unemployment rate does not take into account huge blocs of unemployed workers in the U.S.

Workers are only considered unemployed if they meet the Labor Department's criteria for active job seekers. Workers who have become discouraged by months of fruitless job searching, and do not attend a designated amount of job interviews per month, are categorized as having "dropped out of the labor market." These unemployed workers are then not counted in the official unemployment rate.

Also not counted in the official unemployment rate are millions of workers imprisoned by the racist criminal injustice system. The U.S. has the largest prison population in the world, with more than 2.3 million people behind bars. These workers, who would otherwise be competing for gainful employment, are forced out of the labor market and into the prison industrial complex, where they work for little to no pay.

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Massive militant turnout for Boston march against racism

Editor's note: Workers World is in its 50th year of publication. Throughout the year, we will share with our readers some of the paper's content over the past half century. The following excerpts are from a Dec. 20, 1974, article about a massive march to counter racist attacks during the busing of Black school-children to Boston schools. The full version can be read at www.workers.org.

By Andy Stapp

The most massive and militant demonstration against racism held anywhere in the United States for a decade took place today in Boston.

The march was called by the Emergency Committee for a National Mobilization Against Racism, an organization set up to counter racist and fascist groups who have been instigating lynch mob attacks on Black people under the code slogan of “fighting busing.”

Many [present] were among the estimated 5,000 people who came from 36 states to join 20,000 local residents, almost half of whom were Black.

The march gathered wide support, especially from labor. Half a million leaflets had been handed out. South Boston itself, an organizing center for the fascists, was heavily postered.

A number of gay women pasted 100 posters over the racist epithets and swastikas that have confronted Black schoolchildren.

Although it was cold and threatening to rain, the crowd was in high spirits. Those present could see it would be larger than anything the racists had been able to organize—despite almost a decade of segregationist organizing in South Boston.

In the face of the militant crowd, not one racist dared show his face.

Less than a week before, 600 of the most vicious racists had trapped 100 Black children inside South Boston High School for four hours, threatening to kill them. Commentators implied that this was how the majority in Boston feel about Black people trying to get equal rights.

Study group discusses the environment and the working class

The weekly New York FIST discussion/study group on June 5 focused on the environment—the role capitalism and U.S. imperialism play in the destruction of the environment, the so-called U.S. corporate “green” movement, and the steps that socialist countries have taken to control pollution.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on the use of cereals to produce biofuel. Questions raised included the development of ethanol in Brazil; the determination of oil prices based on the dollar; and how to talk to the working class about the environmental issues, and to environmental activists about the real root—and solution—to the crisis.

The discussion groups will continue weekly. On July 11, FIST and friends will be joined by Pan African Newswire editor and Workers World party member Abayomi Azikiwe, who will lead the group in a discussion on Africa.

For more information, call 212-627-2994 or email FIST@workers.org.

The demonstration dramatically showed the majority of people have nothing in common with the lynchers.

Many had come from the South to help fight the racists, just as 10 years ago many from Boston went South to aid in the struggle there.

It had been announced that the march would proceed down Boylston Street, a route the racists have often used in their “anti-busing” marches. But when the march reached Boylston and Massachusetts Avenue, dozens of mounted cops, over 100 riot police and scores of cop cars and vans blocked the way.

Suddenly, the police charged, clubbing and pushing. Six marchers were arrested.

By the time Mtangulizi, the chairman of the rally, introduced Ralph Abernathy, 25,000 people had massed in the Boston Common.

Abernathy said, “We have come to Boston to say that Hicks [Louise Day Hicks, leader of Restore Our Alienated Rights] and all her gang should be jailed.” He said of poor whites, “Their struggle is our struggle. Let us get together and let the racists know we are not going to be turned back.”

He was followed by Dick Gregory, saying, “We’re going to see to it that these few rich elite stop tricking white folks. The power class in this country wouldn’t walk their dogs through the poor white neighborhoods or wash their feet in the pots poor whites cook in.”

Jesús López of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party stated, “We are participating in this rally to raise the voice of the Puerto Rican people who are fighting the same enemy, U.S. imperialism.” Ellen Moves Camp, representing the American Indian Movement, called on all people to “stand as one against racism in the U.S.”

John Boone, a leader in the fight against U.S. prisons, introduced the wife of a prisoner who said, “It’s time for people like myself to say we can’t live with racism. I’m convinced that together we can do it.”

Marguerita Skinner, a Black student attending school in South Boston, stated, “We ought to be allowed to go to school there just like they are.” Linda Lawrence, a white high school student, said that many of the white kids weren’t against going to school with the Black students but that their parents were making them stay out. She said, “Deep imbedded racism” runs rampant where she lives and that she had been threatened for being seen with Black children.

Claudette Furlonge, a national coordinator for Women United For Action, urged: “Our presence has shown them that they can’t stop the struggle of Black people for freedom and justice. We must get to those who instigate the violence, finance the organizing, those who find it so very profitable to have poor fighting poor.”

State Sen. Bill Owens, the first Black state senator of Massachusetts, said, “At some point we have to make a decision. Stand up or lie down and die like dogs.” Owens stated, “Mayor White had the audacity to turn loose his militia on us this morning, willing to sacrifice all of us in favor of capitalism and big business.”

The night before, the Student Committee held a teach-in at Harvard with nearly 1,000 in attendance.

Georgia state Sen. Julian Bond said the racism was “cheered and encouraged by a parochial president” and “wrapped in and sanctified by the American flag.”

Support rallies were held in Seattle, San Francisco, Pasadena, Houston, Dubuque, Portland, Youngstown, Milwaukee and Denver.



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First New England trans pride march held in Northampton, Mass.

By Frank Neisser
Northampton, Mass.

A spirited and militant crowd of more than 1,000 trans and gender non-conforming people and their supporters marched and rallied in 90-degree heat here June 7, in a historic first New England Trans Pride Day. The official slogan on posters and T-shirts was “Remember Stonewall? That was US!”

Dozens of banners reflected many participating organizations, including Smith School for Social Work LGBTQQ Alliance; Boston Dyke March; Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition; Transcend from Pittsfield, Mass.; Tapestry Health Center; Vermont TransAction; The Network/La Red; Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition; and the International Action Center.

The march was led by Grand Marshall Miss Major, an African-American transwoman who is a veteran of the Stonewall Rebellion and a lead organizer for the Trans/Gender Variant in Prison Committee.

The rally opened with a welcoming statement from the Northampton mayor, Clare Higgins. Jill Berlin from TransForming Families described her process of learning from and supporting her trans son and other trans people.

A moving statement was read from Elliot Holloway, a 19-year-old white trans man who organized for his high school gay-straight alliance to be trans inclusive. Monica Roberts of Louisville, Ky., an African-American trans organizer and leader, cited W.E.B. Dubois and Nelson Mandela, and said, “We owe it to ourselves to fight like Miss Major and Sylvia Rivera (Stonewall rebellion veterans).”

Bet Power, member of the New England Transgender Pride Steering Committee and curator of the Sexual Minority Archives, invoked Sylvia Rivera who “threw a bottle at a cop and changed the world.” Marie Ali, Trinidadian steering committee member and trans lesbian woman, con-

demned Congress for failing to include trans people in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

Steering committee member Jacklyn Matts cited trans pride actions around the country and challenged the crowd to remain active to “fight the war against trans people” and overcome the one-in-12 murder rate and massive discrimination suffered by trans people.

Gunner Scott of the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition called on people to support the Massachusetts Transgender



Monica Roberts, nat'l trans leader.

Civil Rights Bill, HB 1722.

The chair read a statement from Leslie Feinberg, trans movement pioneer, author and managing editor of Workers World newspaper, and urged participants to read Workers World newspaper.

Imani Henry from the International Action Center dispelled the myth that trans people are only concerned with their physical bodies, hormones and surgeries, but are integral and in the forefront of fighting against the economic exploitation of all people. He asked the crowd if they were outraged at the Sean Bell verdict, the jailing of the Jersey 4—four African-American lesbians imprisoned for defending themselves against an anti-LGBT attack—and the rush to war against Iran, and everyone's hand went up each time.

In Seattle, San Francisco, New York and now in New England, trans activists for the last few years have been organizing to link the issues of trans oppression with other social justice issues. Repression has been on the rise against all lesbian, gay, bi and trans people. LGBT people, especially trans people, still live without basic human rights. This first New England Trans Pride rally is a step forward for the entire progressive movement. □



Grand Marshal Miss Major and a student delegation.



WW PHOTOS: IMANI HENRY

Loans for junior colleges becoming extinct

By Larry Hales

Some of the largest banks in the country are now ceasing to extend student loans to those attending junior colleges, community colleges and technical schools. More than 40 percent of students enrolled in college attend community colleges, as they are considerably less expensive than four-year colleges or universities.

The standards for borrowing, even for four-year schools, will become stricter and will rely on the borrowers' histories and their parents' histories of credit.

The annual report released by the College Board for 2007-2008 showed that tuition costs jumped 6.6 percent from the previous year. The jump is twice the rate of overall inflation. Factor in room and board, and the total costs of a public four-year university are up 5.9 percent, with an average total of \$13,589 per year.

The total cost of a private four-year school is more than \$32,000, with tuition accounting for more than \$23,000 of the total.

The Pell Grants, which do not have to be repaid, have failed to keep up with inflation. According to the College Board, the average recipient of a Pell Grant received \$2,494 in the 2006-2007 school year.

Students wanting to obtain a higher education should not have to rely on student loans. The price tag continues to climb beyond the reach of the average student; so loans are ultimately a trap, putting students in debt to the tune of \$20,000 on the average.

Some students rack up debt as high as \$100,000, especially if they require advanced degrees for their profession of choice.

However, the recent development of lending institutions denying loans to many two-year schools will affect people of color and the poor, as these schools are usually the most reasonable and sensible option.

The reasoning behind the denials, according to the banks, is the high default rate among students who attend two-year schools, and for the banks this constitutes a high risk.

But the problem is much deeper than that. The decision has much more to do with the overall credit crisis, especially considering that most student loans are federally guaranteed. Going into default means constant harassment of the borrower, including wage garnishment, federal lawsuits and tax refund seizure.

A March 20th article, “Financial crisis hits students,” in Workers World newspaper illustrated how the financial crisis was partly brought on by the subprime mortgage loan problem. Julie Fry wrote: “Here's what is happening: many state and local governments secure money for public or quasi-public programs through a venue that most people have never heard of called the market for auction-rate securities. Before the financial crisis, auction-rate securities offered the government borrowers a very low interest rate and it offered lenders (banks and other corporations) ready access to their cash investment through regularly scheduled auctions for the bonds, where they could sell their investment and get their cash back on sometimes a weekly basis. They were earning a higher return than they would with their money in a bank.

“All the investments were insured by companies called bond insurers, which specialize in guaranteeing this kind of debt. Here is where things started to unravel. These bond insurers also insure other types of debt—like subprime mortgages. Now that these insurance companies are going to have to secure those loans, the banks don't think they can guarantee student loan debt as well.”

Though there are many institutions that still lend to two-year colleges, there is an overall crisis of the student loan industry. The Department of Education has had to assume \$40 billion of debt from student loans, and large lenders have reported huge losses; for example, Sallie Mae reported a loss of \$104 million for the first quarter of 2008.

If the losses affected only the lenders, the CEOs and the super rich, then it would be cause to celebrate, but it is the poor, workers and people of color who will feel the brunt of the pain of one crisis after another.

More and more jobs are being lost—300,000 already this year. Wages are being cut in half or at least lag far behind inflation. The price of gas continues to rise, now at an average of \$4 per gallon. The price of food climbs further. Hundreds of thousands of people around the country face being kicked out of their homes, both those who are owners and those who are renters. The U.S. has one of the highest rates of illiteracy amongst the industrialized countries.

All of these crises are occurring when the option of higher education is being denied and getting further out of reach. □

Local D.C. government implements surge strategy at home

By David Hoskins

Washington, D.C., Mayor Adrian Fenty signed an executive order last week authorizing the chief of police to seal off select neighborhoods. Armed officers will establish checkpoints where District residents and visitors are required to show photo identification and provide a “legitimate” purpose for their entry into the neighborhood. Those unable to demonstrate that they live there or have a legitimate reason to visit, such as a medical appointment, work or religious service, will be sent away and may face arrest.

Mayor Fenty and police Chief Cathy Lanier refer to the checkpoints as Neighborhood Safety Zones and have touted them as a necessary “crime” fighting measure. This ignores the fact that the real criminals in inner city neighborhoods are often the police—who harass, beat and sometimes kill innocent civilians with impunity. The establishment of an NSZ only encourages such behavior by police.

Chief Lanier is implementing the first

NSZ in D.C.'s Trinidad neighborhood. Trinidad is a historically Black working-class neighborhood that has seen many of its low-income residents pushed out in recent years by gentrification. The mayor and police department have used a spate of 22 killings this year as a pretext for wholesale occupation of neighborhoods such as Trinidad.

Checkpoint opponents rightly decry the measure as an unconstitutional violation of civil liberties that threatens to turn District neighborhoods into an Iraq-style war zone.

“It seems interesting that police are willing to easily cast aside fundamental freedoms for quick-fix, lazy law enforcement tactics,” said Johnny Barnes, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of the National Capital Area. Barnes promised that his group would do everything possible to protect the rights of the people.

Dozens of lawyers and law students are monitoring checkpoints to gather evidence of rights violations for a possible lawsuit.

Moratorium NOW! Coalition fights to stop foreclosures and evictions

By Kris Hamel
Detroit

Michigan has been in an economic depression for several years due in large part to restructuring, plant closings, buyouts and layoffs in the auto industry. More than 400,000 jobs have been lost in the state since 2001. Now, that economic crisis has extended nationwide.

According to a report issued on June 5 by the Mortgage Bankers Association, approximately one of every 11 mortgages in the U.S. was past due or in foreclosure at the end of March. Both the rate of new foreclosures and late payments on home mortgages are the highest on record since the MBA began collecting data in 1979.

As home values have declined, homeowners' equity in their homes, which is considered the single biggest asset most workers have, has plummeted 46.2 percent. This is the lowest level on record going back to the end of World War II.

The MBA report acknowledges that the foreclosure crisis has spread beyond the predatory subprime mortgage fiasco. Even people with fixed mortgages are now unable to keep up with payments.

Falling home values have left many homeowners with mortgages in excess of the value of their homes. Housing prices have fallen 16 percent from their peak in 2006. Some economists expect that to further bottom out to a 25 percent decline.

With the capitalist economy teetering on the brink of disaster, many workers are faced with adjustable rate mortgages that have reset to higher, often usurious rates, at the same time that the cost of gasoline, utilities, medical care and food has soared. Wages are not keeping pace with inflation. High unemployment and the high cost of living have contributed to a growing crisis for poor and working people around the U.S.

It is in this context that the struggle in Michigan for a moratorium on foreclosures takes on greater importance. The Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures and Evictions is organizing around the state to win passage of SB 1306, a two-year moratorium introduced into the Michigan Legislature by state Sen. Hansen Clarke.

In 2007, activists with the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice began to popularize the idea of a foreclosure moratorium based on the emergency powers invested in the governor by the state constitution during times of disaster. Demonstrations were held at the state capitol in Lansing



WW PHOTO: ALAN POLLOCK
Kim Greene of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition speaks out at Detroit demonstration against mortgage bankers.

Moratoriums were also in place in 25 other states. The moratorium was upheld as constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that in times of economic crisis the right of workers to their homes superseded the constitutional contract rights of the banks. That ruling is still on the books today.

The struggle has taken on renewed energy with the introduction of SB 1306. Coalition organizers took to the streets of downtown Detroit on June 6 with a protest outside of several banks—Chase, National City and Charter One—all of which participate in the record foreclosures taking place throughout Michigan. The protesters chanted, “Home foreclosures are a crime—make the bankers do the time!” One worker said she heard the demonstration all the way on the 15th floor of the building where her office is located.

This week the coalition took the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development into federal court. Coalition lawyers challenged HUD’s policy of collaborating with the banks and mortgage companies to evict foreclosure victims from their homes. HUD violates their own rules that mandate working with these individuals to allow them to continue to occupy their homes. In these FHA-insured homes, the government makes up any losses the bankers may suffer.

On June 14 the coalition is holding a town hall meeting where Sen. Hansen Clarke will hear testimony on how foreclosures, evictions and declining neighborhoods are affecting people in communities throughout Michigan. A statewide organizing session preceding the meeting will map out plans for taking the campaign across Michigan, culminating with a mass demonstration when the legislature reconvenes in September.

For more information, contact the coalition at 313-319-0870, moratorium@moratorium-mi.org, or visit www.moratorium-mi.org. Donations can be sent to the Moratorium NOW! Coalition at 23 E. Adams, 4th Floor, Detroit, MI 48226. □

demanding that Gov. Jennifer Granholm declare a state of economic emergency and impose a moratorium to stop foreclosures and evictions.

MECAWI activists pointed to the Great Depression of the 1930s as the basis for this demand. During that time, a moratorium on foreclosures was enacted and renewed for a five-year period in Michigan.

ON THE PICKET LINE

by Sue Davis

Immigrant workers’ hunger strike continues

Lured in 2006 with promises of green cards for themselves and their families, more than 550 metal fitters and welders were devastated to discover soon after they arrived from India that Signal International was only offering them short-term H-2B visas.

The maritime oil rig construction company based in Pascagoula, Miss., hired the skilled immigrants to rebuild its holdings in the Gulf after the 2005 hurricanes. Not only had recruiters forced the men to pay \$20,000 for the “privilege” of working in the U.S., but the workers were subject to slave-labor living and working conditions. No wonder 100 workers bravely walked off the job on March 6! To further dramatize their struggle against human trafficking, the workers took their protest to Washington, D.C., where about a dozen workers have been on a hunger strike since May 14. They are demanding that the Justice Department and immigration officials investigate charges of fraud and exploitation and offer them protection, since they lost legal immigration status when they left the job.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, working with the Indian Workers Congress and the Alliance of Guest Workers for Dignity, an affiliate of the New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice, filed a federal lawsuit against Signal and the recruiters on March 6. (New York Times, June 7)

Burger King will pay more for tomatoes!

Florida tomato pickers, mostly immigrant workers from Latin America, have been fighting for livable wages for years. On May 23 they won a long, important battle when Burger King finally dropped its aggressive, dirty tactics and agreed to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ demands to pay a penny more per pound for tomatoes. With the one-cent increase, workers will earn 77 cents, instead of 45 cents, for a 32-pound bucket of tomatoes. The 71 percent increase will go a long way toward raising the workers’ current annual poverty wages that range from \$10,000 to \$12,000. (CIW press release, May 23)

When Burger King joined Yum! Brands (Taco Bell) and McDonalds in supporting the workers’ demands, its CEO “apologized” for BK’s vicious tactics, which included spying on and lying about CIW. But that didn’t faze the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, which represents 90 percent of the state’s growers. Though the FTGE dropped its threat of imposing \$100,000 fines on members who ante up the penny-a-pound pay raise, it advised members not to go along with it. (New York Times, May 24) ¡La lucha continúa!

Delta flight attendants continue union fight

The National Mediation Board refused to certify the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA to represent Delta flight attendants on May 28. Though the vast majority of the 5,306 members who voted cast ballots for the union, that’s only about 40 percent of the total number of workers, and federal rules require that a majority participate in the vote.

The AFA-CWA cited an aggressive voter suppression campaign involving—no surprise—intimidation and coercion by Delta management as a major factor in the outcome. Nonetheless, the union vows to keep fighting. Patricia Friend, international president of AFA-CWA, is optimistic that the upcoming vote in connection with Delta’s merger with Northwest will result in winning AFA-CWA representation. (AFA-CWA press release, May 28)

Two UAW locals win strikes

Like members of four United Auto Workers locals at American Axle plants, Local 602 in Lansing, Mich., and Local 31 in Fairfax, Kan., were forced to go on strike this spring. Unlike the American Axle workers—who must be commended for putting up such a valiant fight on behalf of themselves and all U.S. workers—both UAW locals won better contracts for their sacrifices.

The 2,300 workers in Local 602, who build SUVs for General Motors, went on strike April 17 and reached an agreement May 15 that restricts subcontracting of skilled trades and provides a say in job organization. The 1,800 workers in Local 31, who went on strike May 5 and went back to work on May 22, were able to stop GM from suspending seniority rules for various job assignments and won better terms for overtime and job classifications. (www.uaw.org) □

U.S. gov’t hides *real* jobless crisis

Continued from page 1

3) The unemployment rate is ‘low by historical standards’

In a speech delivered the same day the Labor Department’s report was released, President Bush stressed that the U.S. unemployment rate was “still low by historical standards.” This has been a favorite refrain of the Bush administration lately, and has been repeated by nearly every corporate controlled media outlet. Even more liberal news outlets such as NPR have taken to reporting this refrain. (NPR, June 06).

But the reality is that the current “official” unemployment rate is wholly inaccurate. It does not come close to adequately assessing the number of U.S. workers without jobs. The ruling class’s deliberate strategy of not counting hundreds of thousands of jobless workers, and the incarceration of millions of workers in the prison industrial complex, has completely distorted the official unemployment number. Whether or not that distorted number is low by historical standards is meaningless.

4) Immigrants and workers in developing economies are responsible for job loss in the U.S.

This lie has been propagated ad nauseum by racist blowhards from Ross Perot to Lou Dobbs. Unsurprisingly, the response by the ruling class politicians and pundits to the current economic crisis has

been to blame immigrants and workers in developing countries for job losses here in the U.S.

But it is the bosses’ drive for profit that has led businesses to reorganize production networks across the globe. It is the drive for profit that has led corporations to move production offshore in search of lower cost labor to exploit.

Workers in developing countries are struggling to feed and house their families, just as workers are struggling to do here in the U.S. It is the bosses and bankers who initiate the layoffs, wage cuts and foreclosures—not fellow workers.

Four myths—and one unavoidable truth

Behind the Labor Department’s shady statistics lies the unavoidable fact that the free market capitalist economy in the U.S. has broken down beyond repair and needs to be replaced. With each new wave of layoffs, wage cuts and foreclosures, more workers are coming to the stark realization that the so-called “American Dream” was nothing but an illusion.

As the U.S. capitalist economy continues to break down, there has never been a better time to intensify the struggle for socialism in the U.S. The deepening economic crisis is daily proving that a new economic system, focused on human needs—not corporate profit margins—is desperately need in the U.S. immediately.

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LOS ANGELES

40,000 teachers protest budget cuts

By J. La Riva
UTLA Member, Los Angeles

More than 40,000 teachers with the United Teachers Los Angeles sacrificed an hour of their pay to protest proposed state budget cuts on June 6. The hour-long protests were held in front of schools, as students entered campus and administrators were relegated to supervising children. From elementary through high school, students, parents, teachers and labor supporters wore placards and distributed flyers to other parents, students and commuters. Labor and community support was evident with cars honking, hands waving and volunteers and students remaining outside with their teachers.

The last time UTLA had an action was in 1989, when teachers went on strike for two weeks. The June 6 action went beyond the union's expectations, with 75 percent of teachers not reporting for work and other support staff, who were not authorized to stay out, remaining outside in a show of solidarity.

The proposed budget cuts include no cost-of-living increase for teachers and cuts to many programs throughout the schools. According to the Los Angeles Unified School District, these state budget cuts will mean a \$353-million-dollar shortfall. Because of the budget cuts,

LAUSD has said that 6,500 probationary teachers will be laid off, an action UTLA has vowed to fight.

While LAUSD Superintendent David Brewer was unsuccessful in his attempt to get a restraining order against the protest, a smear telephone campaign was implemented in an attempt to discredit the union's action. According to UTLA President A. J. Duffy, "If he [Brewer] was standing next to me ... then no Legislature, no governor would try to take the kind of cuts out of education that they're talking about." (Los Angeles Times, June 7).

Scare tactics were also used, claiming students' safety was at risk. However, no incidents or injuries were reported during the stay-out. Instead, many older students remained outside independently or with parents to protest, and younger children were cooperative and concerned inside the campuses. Many students complained later that they were bored and missed their teachers. The large turnout and positive reports demonstrate that the



PHOTO: JAMES CASEY

United Teachers Los Angeles fight for the right to an education.

action, and future actions if necessary, will be well supported and well attended.

While schools throughout the Los Angeles area and the country are in dire need of funds to improve student achievement and secure jobs, the continued attack on public education is just an indication that public education is not a priority to any administration—from Sacramento,

Calif., to Washington, D.C.

To slash education from the most vulnerable of individuals—children—is shameful and does indeed leave every child left behind. UTLA is a united front that will stand at the vanguard and protect public education, the rights of teachers and other labor as they fight for a decent wage and job security. □

Amidst crisis in North Carolina

Mental health workers struggle for justice

By Dante Strobino
Raleigh, N.C.

The mental health care system in North Carolina is in a state of crisis. More than 1,000 workers are put out of work due to injuries each year. Since December 2000, at least 82 patients have died in ways that raise questions, including homicides and suicides. Workers are incredibly underpaid, with health care technicians, the bulk of the front-line workers, earning on average less than \$24,000 per year and forced to work incredible amounts of overtime in unsafe and understaffed conditions to pay their bills. North Carolina mental hospitals discharged 1,182 mental health care patients and sent them to live in homeless shelters last year. Many of them soon entered the state's overcrowded prisons. More than \$400 million in state funds were wasted in the state's privatization efforts over the last six years.

Members of the NC Public Service Workers Union, UE Local 150, have launched a Mental Health Workers Bill of Rights campaign to promote standards that protect and guarantee essential needs and rights for mental health workers, to provide quality care for patients and in general to address the present crisis.

Common concerns about the operation of the state mental health institutions stem from the failures of a Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reform plan approved in 2001 by Governor Michael Easley.

The bosses tried to blame the crisis on the workers. In February, when the crisis was first being exposed, front page articles in the Raleigh News & Observer claimed workers were responsible for the violence. One article, titled "Caregivers abuse patients, and get away with it" (March 1), was part of a five-part series about the injuries faced by patients and



On May 29th, more than 200 workers attended the UE 150 Mental Health Workers Public Hearing. Before the hearing, workers held a public rally to expose the conditions at the state hospitals, demand Dix hospital stay open at least one year longer and demand a Mental Health Workers Bill of Rights.

WW PHOTO: DANTE STROBINO

Greensboro, N.C., by UE 150 members in DHHS institutions throughout the state to begin to lay out the direction of the campaign. Since then, workers across the state have organized rallies at their workplaces to highlight their working conditions.

Then on May 29, more than 200 workers from all over the state attended a UE 150 public hearing to address the crisis. Workers were able to give testimony about their injuries to a panel consisting of five state senators and representatives, prominent community leaders and other decision makers, including the Rev. John Mendez of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; African-American community activist Octavia Rainey; Kendra Jason of the Student-Worker Alliance at North Carolina State University; civil rights lawyer Lewis Pitts; and Ashwini Sukthankar, director of the International Commission for Labor Rights from India.

At the end of the hearing, the Mental Health Workers Bill of Rights was read aloud by everyone in the audience. The document's demands include the right to adequate staffing levels, a safe workplace and the right to defend oneself, the right to deny forced overtime, family-supporting wages, the right to evaluate one's boss, freedom from racism and sexism, collective bargaining and more.

Next: Privatization, public institutions and capitalism.

Strobino is an UE organizer and a member of the youth group FIST—Fight Imperialism, Stand Together.

the wasting of \$400 million by privatized local mental health providers. Workers were also blamed for the loss of accreditation in three of the four state psychiatric hospitals, resulting in the loss of federal Medicaid funding totaling more than \$10 million.

The state of North Carolina gives more than \$1 billion in tax breaks to the rich and corporations each year. Put into that context, this blaming of workers is no accident. It is part of a strategy to shape public opinion to pose the needs and rights of the workers as being in conflict with the needs and rights of patients, instead of their being interconnected.

"Injuries have increased among employees and patients," said Larsene Taylor, 58, a health technician at Cherry Hospital in Goldsboro, N.C., and chair of UE 150's DHHS Council. "We care about these patients and we're not going to take the blame for it."

The bosses responded with even worse policies. For example, at Broughton Hospital in Morganton, N.C., Interim Hospital Director Dr. Art Robarge passed a "hands off" policy—meaning that workers cannot put their hands on patients

even if they get violent—making it nearly impossible for workers to do their jobs and with no regard for their safety.

Broken backs from rushing through understaffed wards and falling, urinary tract infections from sitting one-to-one with patients for excessive hours, and being stabbed in the abdomen with scissors by an unwatched patient are just a few of the hundreds of examples of injuries suffered by workers that unnecessarily occurred over the last few months. Many patients have died or suffered permanent injuries.

"We need more staff," said Rosie Hargrove, UE 150 member from John Umstead Hospital in Butner, N.C., as she stood picketing at the entrance to the Dorothea Dix hospital campus on June 6. "And we need better pay to keep the staff we have from leaving."

Mental Health Workers Bill of Rights Campaign

In order to fight back, the workers have increased the influence of their union, UE Local 150, through the Mental Health Workers Bill of Rights campaign. On March 29, an assembly was convened in

Three sentences overturned

Cuban 5 convictions upheld by appellate court

By Julie Fry

A three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the verdicts of guilt against each of the five Cuban heroes on June 4. This was the second round of appeals for the Five, all of whom have been in prison for almost a decade for trying to prevent U.S.-backed terrorist organizations in Miami from engaging in violent attacks on Cuba.

In a 99-page opinion, the court held in its majority decision, written by Judge William Pryor, that the 1998 trial of the Five in Miami was lawful and fair, despite the lack of evidence in the prosecution’s case, the numerous flawed procedural and evidentiary rulings by the trial judge, and the shocking examples of gross prosecutorial misconduct referenced in the panel’s decision. One judge, Phyllis Kravitch, issued a dissenting opinion in which she found that the conviction of Gerardo Hernández for conspiracy to commit murder should be overturned because the prosecutor’s evidence was insufficient to prove the charge. But the third judge, Stanley Birch, while referring to this decision as a “very close case,” nevertheless voted with Judge Pryor to uphold all of the convictions.

Judge Pryor—who was appointed by the current Bush administration and failed to win Senate confirmation at first because of his reputation as a right-wing zealot with little regard for the Constitution—was the only judge on the panel who did not hear the Five’s original appeal. In his opinion, Pryor noted several examples of egregious prosecutorial misconduct in the presence of the jury during the original trial. For example, Pryor admitted that the prosecutor stated in his closing argument that the Five were “bent on destroying the United States” and that they were trying to execute what the prosecutor called “the final solution” against the anti-Cuba forces in Miami. Pryor determined that these and several other statements could have had only “minor” effect on the jury and that there was no cause for a new trial.

Although the convictions were upheld, the sentences of Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and Antonio Guerrero were overturned. The three now face a new sentencing hearing in Miami before the original trial judge in the case, Judge Joan Lenard. In 1998, Lenard gave each of the Five extremely long sentences, including life terms for three of them.

Message from Gerardo Hernández:

We will resist until we receive justice

Upon learning the decision of the Atlanta Court of Appeals, Gerardo Hernández, one of the Cuban Five, spoke with Alicia Jrapko by telephone, giving the following message, which was reported to the June 6 New York protest:

“He said that he was not surprised by the decision, as this is the same ‘justice’ system that has incarcerated Mumia, Leonard Peltier and the Puerto Rican political prisoners for more than 20 years. ‘We will do the time—30 years, 40 years, whatever—because as long as you outside are resisting, we will also resist until we receive justice.’

“He said to tell everyone who asks about him that he is fine, with a lot of strength and always moving forward.” □



New York protest, June 6.

WWW PHOTO: JOHN CATALINOTTO

The decision is a setback for the Five and their supporters in Cuba, the U.S. and around the world. After being tried in Miami under a constant barrage of anti-Cuba hostility from the local media and right-wing organizations, many international and national organizations have noted that the trial of the Five was

extremely unfair. The executive director of the National Lawyers Guild, Heidi Boghosian, said in a statement, “Anti-Cuba sentiment has tainted all possibility of a fair trial for the Five since their original arrest and confinement, which the U.N. Rapporteur on Torture described as violating the Convention Against

Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.” Boghosian noted: “During the original trial, the Bush administration paid journalists to write unfavorable stories about Cuba. Anti-Cuban extremists tried to intimidate the jurors, and even prospective jurors admitted that they would be afraid to return not-

Barack Obama, wherefore art thou?

By Dolores Cox

You’re my guy; don’t get me wrong. But did you have to be so adamant and vociferous when you addressed the Cuban American National Foundation on May 23 during the commemoration of Cuban Independence Week regarding Fidel Castro and the Cuban government?

The issue of Cuba could play a significant role, since Florida could be critical to you winning in the November election. But you almost came across sounding like some preacher in the pulpit (pun intended) or like one of those right-wing hate mongers. You could’ve toned it down a bit and still have gotten your message across.

You’re willing to meet with the likes of Fidel, and now Raúl Castro, and talk with other “enemies” at any time and place of your choosing. You say it’s “time to pursue diplomacy with friends and foe alike without preconditions.” Current U.S. policy, it should be noted, is that there can be no negotiations whatsoever with Cuba’s leaders. And this influential and powerful anti-Castro exile group does not share your willingness to talk to Cuba.

You also said you’ll immediately ease restrictions on travel and limits on the amount of money relatives here can send back home to Cuba if and when you become president. Let’s hope you mean it (and can do it). And while you’re at it, how about lifting the travel ban completely for everyone?

At the same time that you talk about opening up diplomatic relations with Cuba, though, you say that you’re committed to maintaining the nearly fifty-year-old economic embargo, as a way to

force regime change and reforms in Cuba.

And you speak about needing to see “significant steps toward democracy there.” What are these steps you allude to that must be taken? Do you mean conversion to a capitalist system? Or allowing domination and control by the U.S. of their island, instead of sovereignty?

We know you’re worried about committing political suicide and all that, but are the votes of that group in Miami and their sympathizers really more important than a sense of decency? Are dishonest ways of currying favor also more important? Do Cuba and Castro really inspire so much vehemence in you and arouse your ire? And if so, are you conveniently forgetting certain facts?

Facts like the U.S.’s numerous assassination attempts on Castro? Like the Bay of Pigs operation? Like U.S. support and installation of numerous dictators and monarchies worldwide and conducting daily business with them, etc.?

What’s next? Another assassination attempt? Bombing or another invasion attempt? More poisoning of Cuba’s tobacco crops? More punishing of countries that do business with Cuba? More spying on Cuba? More vicious propaganda?

When will enough be enough? (We also remember the U.S. bombing of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada in an effort to root out communism everywhere on this planet, by any means necessary.)

Or does the U. S. have something in mind similar to the guise of bringing freedom and democracy to the people of Iraq as justification for invading their country, destroying their economy and infrastructure, arrests of its citizens,

theft of their treasury, deposing and engineering the murder of their leader, and causing the death and displacement of thousands of innocent civilians? Are you content to see the United States government and its people continue to be viewed as bullies and pariahs, conducting despicable acts of terrorism and imperialism worldwide?

And Obama, why did you speak so passionately about “dissidents in Cuba who are locked away in dark cells for the crime of speaking the truth” as you describe them? Especially when the U.S. government continues to incarcerate hundreds of political prisoners unjustly? You went on to say, “Never in the lives of two generations of Cubans have the people of Cuba known democracy; this is the terrible and tragic status quo.” And you added that “for half a century elections in Cuba have been anything but free and fair.” You ended your speech by promising the Cuban people that you “won’t stand for this injustice” and you’ll “stand up for their freedom,” if elected president.

Ironically, your message of condemnation is given at the same time that the U.S. continues to exploit, oppress and commit human rights crimes all over the world, moving from one target to the next. And, needless to say, the government has been violating the civil and human rights of its own people here at home for hundreds of years (Post-Katrina, especially New Orleans, shows us who the government really cares about in this so-called great democracy.) Come on now, Obama. Let’s clean up our own backyard before pointing fingers elsewhere. To coin a phrase, “Me thinks thou doth protest too much.”

We understand that you have alle-

Open Letter

guilty verdicts against the Five.”

News of the decision caused swift reaction around the world from supporters of the Five. Demonstrations were held in New York, Miami, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Detroit, Los Angeles and in many other U.S. cities in the days following the decision. Other demonstrations have since taken place in many countries in Europe and Latin America.

According to one of the lawyers for the Five, Leonard Weinglass, the next legal step is to submit a motion to reargue the appeal before the same three-judge panel. That motion will be submitted later this month. After that, the attorneys still have the option of requesting that the case be heard by all of the judges of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, or appealing directly to the Supreme Court of the U.S. The resentencing hearing for Labañino, González and Guerrero should be scheduled within the next few months.

In the meantime, the movement in support of the Five is growing inside and outside of the U.S. New York solidarity organizations are planning a conference in support of the Five at Hostos College in the Bronx on June 14th, and many activities are being planned around the country for September and October to acknowledge the 10th anniversary of the arrest of the Five. The millions of supporters of the Five remained determined to win their freedom. □



WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD
Dolores Cox, at NYC rally, demands justice for Sean Bell May 7.

giance to the powers that be. And that you’ve probably been selected based on the Jackie Robinson principle with regard to temperament, obedience and acceptability, sort of a “test case.” But you also need to have allegiance to us, the people. Continuing sanctions against Cuba is not the will of the people, except for those who have something vindictive to gain.

Imagine the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world picking on and punishing this small island in the Caribbean just because it can’t have its way with it, because it refuses and resists U.S. imperialism. What a disgrace. How about putting petty and hateful punitive behavior behind? It’s time to give the Cuban people a break.

If you’re really about “Change,” Obama, you must include more extensive policy changes regarding Cuba. As an agent of change in the U.S., you’ll need to give the people what they want. To be sure, it’ll definitely be an uphill battle because the powers that be will exercise every resistance at their disposal, and fight you tooth and nail. But if you’re sincere and have integrity about making change, the people will have your back.

The writer was part of a delegation that attended the 8th annual Latin America Hemispheric Free Trade Agreement Conference in Havana, Cuba, this past April.

Cuban leader says:

The food crisis is systemic and structural

Address by José Ramón Machado Ventura, vice president of Cuba’s Councils of State and Ministers, to the high-level conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy.

(English translation by Climate and Capitalism, from Juventud Rebelde, June 4, 2008)

Mr. Chairman:

Two years ago, in this very hall, the international community agreed to eradicate world hunger. It adopted a goal of halving the number of malnourished people by 2015. Today that modest and inadequate goal seems like a pipe dream.

The world food crisis is not a circumstantial phenomenon. Its recent appearance in such serious form, in a world that produces enough food for all its inhabitants, clearly reveals that the crisis is systemic and structural.

Hunger and malnourishment are the result of an international economic order that maintains and deepens poverty, inequality and injustice.

It is undeniable that the countries of the North bear responsibility for the hunger and malnourishment of 854 million people. They imposed trade liberalization and financial rules that demanded structural adjustment on a world composed of clearly unequal actors. They brought ruin to many small producers in the South and turned self-sufficient and even exporting nations into net importers of food products.

The governments of developed countries refuse to eliminate their outrageous agricultural subsidies while imposing their rules of international trade on the rest of the world. Their voracious transnational corporations set prices, monopolize technologies, impose unfair certification processes on trade, and manipulate distribution channels, sources of financing, trade and supplies for the production of

food worldwide. They also control transportation, scientific research, gene banks and the production of fertilizers and pesticides.

The worst of it all is that, if things continue as they are, the crisis will become even more serious. The production and consumption patterns of developed countries are accelerating global climate change, threatening humanity’s very existence. These patterns must be changed. The irrational attempt to perpetuate these disastrous forms of consumerism is behind the sinister strategy of transforming grains and cereals into fuels.

The Non-Aligned Countries Summit in Havana [is] for the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world and a just and equitable international order. This is the only way to an end to the food crisis.

The right to food is an inalienable human right. Since 1997, this has been confirmed on Cuba’s initiative by successive resolutions adopted by the former Commission on Human Rights and later by the Council and the U.N. General Assembly. Our country, representing the Non-Aligned Movement, and with the support of more than two-thirds of U.N. member states, also proposed the calling of a seventh special session of the Human Rights Council, which has just called for concrete actions to address the world food crisis.

Hunger and malnourishment cannot be eradicated through palliatives, nor with symbolic donations which—let us be honest—will not satisfy peoples’ needs and will not be sustainable.

At the very least, agricultural production in South countries must first be rebuilt and developed. The developed countries have more than enough resources to do this. What’s required is the political will of their governments.

If NATO’s military budget were reduced by a mere 10 percent a year, nearly 100

billion dollars would be freed up.

If the foreign debt of developing countries, a debt they have paid several times over, were cancelled, the countries of the South would have at their disposal the 345 billion dollars now used for annual debt service payments.

If the developed countries honored their commitment to devote 0.7 percent of the Gross Domestic Product to Official Development Aid, the countries of the South would have at least an additional 130 billion dollars a year.

If only one-fourth of the money squandered each year on commercial advertising were devoted to food production, nearly 250 billion dollars could be dedicated to fighting hunger and malnutrition.

If the money devoted to agricultural subsidies in the North were directed to agricultural development in the South, our countries would have around a billion dollars a day to invest in food production.

Mr. Chairman:

I bring this message from Cuba, a country ferociously blockaded but standing proudly by its principles and the unity of its people: yes, we can successfully confront this food crisis, but only if we go to the root of the problem, address its real causes and reject demagoguery, hypocrisy and false promises.

Allow me to conclude by recalling the words of Fidel Castro, when he addressed the U.N. General Assembly in New York in October 1979:

“The din of weapons, of threatening language, and of arrogance on the international scene must cease. Abandon the illusion that the problems of the world can be solved by nuclear weapons. Bombs may kill the hungry, the sick and the uneducated, but bombs cannot kill hunger, disease and illiteracy.”

Thank you very much. □

On his 80th birthday Che’s legacy lives

By Caleb T. Maupin

In his death, Ernesto “Che” Guevara—whose 80th birthday would have been June 14—has become even more powerful than he was in his truly revolutionary life. In modern times, images of Guevara are found across the globe wherever oppressed people are fighting back.

As Lebanon was being rebuilt following the ruthless Israeli bombing campaigns, Che’s defiant glare found its way onto the walls of newly rebuilt homes. The oppressed communities of the part of Ireland still occupied by British imperialism are filled with murals of Guevara’s face, next to other heroes like Nelson Mandela and James Connolly. In China, plays depicting Che’s life are performed in theatres.

Across Eastern Europe, youth defying the “new Europe” of economic suppression bear Che’s face upon their chests. In Vietnam, Belarus, North Korea, Venezuela and Bolivia, Che persists in the memory of millions who hope to build a socialist future.

In Cuba, the home of the revolution Che built successfully, school children pledge not allegiance to an imperialist flag, but that they will “live like Che.”

Guevara—the doctor, warrior-poet, and revolutionary—stands as a symbol of victory against the bosses, capitalists and bankers who sit behind the ruthless forces of the Pentagon and the CIA.

Guevara personally left his revolutionary footprints in Cuba, Guatemala, Bolivia and throughout Africa. Guevara visited Vietnam, advising the revolutionaries while the national liberation struggle to free the nation from imperialism raged. He issued a statement calling for “many Vietnams” to be created—for every corner of the world to be thrust into a state of revolt, so that the forces which put profit above human life could be removed from the halls of power and replaced by the people in their millions.

Che wrote a handbook on guerilla warfare and developed the style and methods of political, ideological and physical warfare against the capitalist ruling class.

Che lives on, not just in images, but in the improvement of human conditions. In Cuba, the peoples’ life expectancy is the highest in South America; every citizen is guaranteed health care and education; infant mortality rates are lower than in the United States; and countless aid is spread throughout the world.



WW PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD
FIST delegation in Cuba calls for Justice for the Cuban Five in the spirit of Che.

In Vietnam, the infant mortality rate has been cut in half since the revolution succeeded. In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which Che showed great solidarity with, nuclear technology has been developed, sending a message to the U.S. and all imperialists that the peoples there will not give up their freedom from imperialism without a fight. In South Africa, apartheid was smashed into the history books. In Zimbabwe, land is being redistributed to the peasants.

In Bolivia, the land where Che lost his life, a revolutionary government calling for a “movement toward socialism” holds power. The government of nearby Venezuela invokes Che constantly as they construct a socialist society.

Yes, Che’s legacy is everywhere. The world will never forget this great revolutionary.

Chinese government continues heroic rescue efforts

By Deirdre Griswold

Everything about the response of the Chinese government to the massive 8.0 magnitude earthquake in Sichuan province shows its ability and willingness to mobilize enormous resources and people-power in a matter of hours in order to carry out a complex plan of rescue, relief and reconstruction.

High praise is pouring in from all over. Francis Markus, the coordinator in China for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said, “We’ve been extraordinarily impressed by the speed, efficiency and commitment of the government’s response to the disaster. ... China will stun the world with the pace [at which] the rebuilding process moves.”

Even George W. Bush had to congratulate China on its handling of the disaster. He is probably hoping to soften comparisons that will inevitably be made to the way his government handled the Katrina flood, which, while a much smaller natural phenomenon, led to chaos and death, especially for the African-American population of New Orleans.

The scale of the problem in China is monumental. The area of the quake—which is full of steep mountains and rushing rivers—has experienced 10,000 aftershocks, some of which have been comparable to small earthquakes.

There are countless tales of great heroism. Several hundred rescue workers, including the crew of an army helicopter on their 64th relief mission, have died trying to reopen roads or fly into the affected towns and villages. Before crashing in turbulence and heavy fog, the copter had ferried 25.8 tons of relief materials, 87 quake relief workers and 234 victims back and forth. Nearly 1.39 million quake survivors have been found and evacuated.

The Chinese government issues daily, detailed reports on the number of people killed, wounded and missing. (See china.org.cn.) As of June 10, four weeks after

the disaster first hit, the toll had risen to 69,142 dead, 374,065 injured, 17,551 missing and 46.25 million people affected in some way. Hospitals had treated 95,252 injured people, of whom most had been released.

Army succeeds in draining lake

A potential second disaster has been averted. The People’s Liberation Army succeeded in blasting a trench through a huge landslide that had blocked the Tongkou River in devastated Beichuan County and created a dangerous lake near the city of Tangjiashan. Some 250,000 people living downstream from the lake were evacuated as soldiers and police struggled to create a safe channel for the water.

Several short-range missiles were fired at boulders to break them up—showing that even some of today’s awesome military weapons can have a peaceful application if the commanders are willing to use them for that purpose.

All those left homeless by the earthquake have been provided with temporary shelter, medical attention, food, clean water, quilts and clothing. Children have been sent to schools outside the region. There have been no outbreaks of cholera or other epidemics that often accompany great social dislocation.

The government has announced a price freeze on construction materials at pre-quake levels, exerting its authority over businesses that would profit over the disaster.

China has come a long way

To get a full appreciation of just what an amazing accomplishment all this is, it must be remembered that just 59 years ago, when the Communist Party-led revolution vaulted to power after decades of struggle against both the landlord-capitalist rulers of China and the invading army of Imperial Japan, the country was overwhelmingly agricultural and impoverished.

Periodic famines and floods ravaged

China has come a long way since its socialist revolution.

Periodic famines and floods used to kill millions of people.

Today it has an advanced infrastructure that has been

mobilized with amazing speed and effectiveness.

China and killed millions of people. Industry was rudimentary in most areas; only a few industrial cities existed along the coast and in the northeast. There was no modern infrastructure—paved roads, electricity, sanitation, communications—in most of China.

To begin large-scale construction projects, the new China had to pull itself up by its own bootstraps, using primarily people power. Tens of thousands of volunteers turned out to build dams, roads and other infrastructure projects. Photos of the period showed long lines of people—“bucket brigades”—passing along the earth and rocks needed.

The revolution had unleashed the energies of the Chinese people to do through mass, collective effort what had been unthinkable.

For the older generation who can still remember those days, China now, especially in the coastal region, is unrecognizable. Vast, gleaming cities have been built and factories hum, turning out manufactured goods for the world. But in the southwest, like Sichuan province, the population is still largely rural and the economy is considered underdeveloped.

While the work being done still depends on the voluntary efforts of millions of people, it is today made a million times more effective by modern technology. Earth movers, trucks, helicopters, satellite phones, generators, antibiotics, blood for transfusions, water purification kits—a myriad of modern supplies have been rushed to the area along with trained personnel to minimize the suffering and casualties.

It is difficult to get an understanding of China’s great efforts through the Western imperialist media. Reports are generally brief and, in the first weeks especially, focused on areas to criticize the government. However, Chinese abroad, many of whom study and work in the United States, expressed their anger through blogs and chat rooms at the lack of compassion and solidarity. The negative tone of the media also may have been tempered somewhat because U.S. companies are looking for markets for their products as China moves quickly to reconstruct a large area of the country.

The media in China are not one-sided;

they report problems as well as achievements. A government commission has been set up to investigate why so many schools collapsed, killing thousands of children, when buildings around them withstood the quake.

It is clear that the building codes in effect did not anticipate a quake of this enormous magnitude—8.0 on the Richter scale. And there were undoubtedly buildings that either did not adhere to the code or were erected before such codes existed.

Howard French, in a June 5 article headed “Experts warned of quake risk in China” in the New York Times, faults “the ruling Communist Party.” Yet he also quotes Chinese scientists who were anguished that they had not pressed for stronger building codes.

“While many say scientists advocated stronger precautionary measures for years, some also expressed a deep sense of failure for not having warned the government in stronger terms that seismic danger there was being underestimated. The Longmenshan belt did not appear, for example, on a recent priority watch list of likely trouble spots. [Longmenshan is a fault line that runs through the affected area.—WW]

“‘Beyond the pain felt by ordinary Chinese, we in earthquake science are guilty beyond description,’ said Ma Shengli, deputy director of the Institute of Geology of the Chinese Earthquake Administration. ‘Our ability fell far short of what was needed, and we can’t help but cry.’”

China today has greater scientific knowledge and a much larger social surplus to draw on in tackling such questions. The reconstruction plans now being drawn up by the government contain much stronger safeguards against earthquake damage.

By contrast, “Despite more than \$22 million in repairs, a levee that broke with catastrophic effect during Hurricane Katrina is leaking again because of the mushy ground on which New Orleans was built, raising serious questions about the reliability of the city’s flood defenses. ... The Army Corps of Engineers has spent about \$4 billion so far of the \$14 billion set aside by Congress to repair and upgrade the metropolitan area’s hundreds of miles of levees by 2011.” (AP, May 22)

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New York’s Chinese outraged at Falun Gong

By Stephen Millies
Flushing, N.Y.

People around the world want to help earthquake survivors in China. The Falun Gong reactionary cult is using this tragedy to attack the People’s Republic of China.

This cult has been going to Chinese communities in New York City with banners attacking the Chinese Communist Party. Falun Gong members have been alleged to discourage contributions to earthquake victims.

Hundreds of thousands of Chinese people live in New York City. Many are outraged at Falun Gong’s activities and have confronted the cult in Manhattan’s Chinatown and in Flushing, Queens.

Despite their grief, these Chinese demonstrators are proud of the immense rescue efforts of the People’s Liberation Army and the Communist Party. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao immediately went to the scene of the earthquake in Sichuan.

What a contrast to George Bush, who let Black people drown and starve in New Orleans.

On May 25 hundreds of Chinese people denounced the Falun Gong on Kissena

Boulevard in Flushing. Beautiful red flags of the People’s Republic were carried by demonstrators. Despite intervention by the police, the Falun Gong was forced to leave the area.

Confrontations between Chinese demonstrators and members of this right-wing cult have been occurring almost daily. The May 27 New York Times reports clashes not only in Flushing but in Manhattan’s Chinatown, with angry Chinese yelling down the Falun Gong demonstrators. Several supporters of the People’s Republic of China have been arrested on trumped-up charges.

Falun Gong claims to advocate meditation and exercise. Lavishly funded, Falun Gong puts out a free newspaper called the Epoch Times that’s filled with grotesque anti-communist lies.

According to the Xinhua news agency, Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi called the SARS epidemic “punishment from heaven” and instructed his followers to hinder efforts to combat this disease. Falun Gong also accused the Chinese government of harvesting body parts of arrested Falun Gong members, something even the U.S. State Department has said it could find no evidence of. □

Nepal’s revolution advances

By David Hoskins

The first historic meeting of Nepal’s Constituent Assembly (CA) culminated in the total abolition of Nepal’s monarchy and the establishment of a federal democratic republic. The measure was approved with the support of 560 Assembly members. Only four members voted against it.

Additional actions stripped King Gyanendra of all royal privileges and gave him fifteen days to vacate the palace and live as a common citizen. The royal flag has been removed and the palace is set to be turned into a national museum.

The historic actions of Nepal’s first CA are the result of more than a decade of people’s war led by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, which paved the way for the abolition of monarchy and the declaration of a republic.

The CPN-M launched its popular revolution in 1996 to end Nepal’s autocratic monarchy and establish a democratic people’s republic. Following waves of street protests which forced Gyanendra to relinquish some of his power, the CPN-M agreed to a ceasefire in June of 2006 and began preparations to compete in the CA elections.

The CPN-M secured a resounding victory in the April CA elections by coming in first place and winning outright more than half of the directly elected seats, despite repeated attempts at interference by the United States and Nepal’s southern neighbor, India. The revolutionaries’ electoral victory was a vindication of their strategy of people’s war and a strong endorsement of their program to abolish the monarchy and declare a republic.

The CPN-M is set to merge with the

Continued on page 9

Amid continuing western attacks

Zimbabwe set for run-off presidential election

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

As a result of the March vote outcome in Zimbabwe, the incumbent, President Robert Mugabe, and the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T), Morgan Tsvangirai, face each other in a June 27 run-off election. According to the official results, the main opposition party had won approximately 47.9 percent of the vote in March, while the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) won over 41 percent.

The Zimbabwe Constitution mandates that if any candidate cannot gather more than 51 percent of the presidential vote, then a run-off election is required. Yet when listening to the Western news reports on Zimbabwe, if one did not know better, they would believe that there is no constitution or law and order prevailing inside the country.

It is remarkable that the ruling party has maintained control and stability during this recent period. Very few other countries have in recent history been subjected to such an intense psychological warfare campaign.

Keeping the recent Iraq experience in mind, any objective observer of the Zimbabwe situation would judge that the former colonial power of Britain and their allies in the United States and Western Europe hold as their ultimate aim the violent regime change from the revolutionary ZANU-PF government to one based on neocolonialism.

With an economy severely affected by sanctions imposed by the U.K., the U.S. and the European Union, in conjunction with the well-financed and coordinated media campaign directed against the existing government in Zimbabwe, the overall image of this independent country remains negative in the minds of millions within the Western world.

Yet despite these media attacks and attempts aimed at the total diplomatic isolation of the ZANU-PF government and its President Robert Mugabe, the country has been able to maintain its national security and to continue with the political processes as required by its constitution.

As a sovereign member nation of the

United Nations and the African Union, Zimbabwe has the perfect right to attend an international conference sponsored by a U.N. agency to discuss an issue that is so critical to its national development.

In fact the current crisis in food production, which in part is caused by the rapid increase in the price of oil, has sparked considerable unrest throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and as of late, Western Europe. The world economic downturn grows out of the crisis in overproduction and the superexploitation of labor and resources of the peoples of the so-called developing countries.

Even if Zimbabwe had not taken such a serious and consistent position against imperialist interference in its internal affairs, the country would still be facing an economic crisis along with other nations throughout the continent and within the Third World countries of Latin America and Asia.

Even the neighboring economic powerhouse, the Republic of South Africa, has experienced a growing energy crisis and a rapid rise in food and fuel prices.

In Zimbabwe’s case, however, the Western media and Western diplomats unfairly blame the current government in Harare for every economic problem inside the country. This biased view of Zimbabwe’s economic problems is totally based on the subjective views towards this country, which defied Western interests by engaging in a massive land redistribution program unprecedented in the region. African nations that take control of their land and resources risk forever suffering the scorn of the imperialist states and their collaborators.

According to a June 2 BBC report, an Australian diplomat called the presence of an African head of state [Mugabe] at the FAO conference in Rome “obscene.” It is almost absurd that someone representing the settler-colonial regime of Australia, which killed in large numbers the Indigenous Black people of that continent, would have the political audacity to attack a leader of one of the most widely known and successful struggles for national independence.

When these types of attacks are made against African leaders, it becomes quite obvious that the real underlying objective

When these types of attacks are made against African leaders, it becomes quite obvious that the real underlying objective of the criticisms leveled against Zimbabwe derive from the desire to reverse the historical process of political and economic independence and to place a government in power in Harare that will carry out the foreign policy objectives of the Western states.

of the criticisms leveled against Zimbabwe derive from the desire to reverse the historical process of political and economic independence and to place a government in power in Harare that will carry out the foreign policy objectives of the Western states.

Western press agencies, through their slanted reporting, have also attacked Zimbabwe’s requirement that all nongovernmental relief agencies operating in the country reregister with the state. What country anywhere in the world allows foreign-based organizations, some of whom intervene in Zimbabwean politics, to act with impunity on their soil?

Reports have surfaced of the failure of Zimbabwe’s government to honor the diplomatic status of U.S. Ambassador James McGee. Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives such as John Stockwell, author of “In Search of Enemies,” have revealed in their books that diplomatic missions were often used as a base for covert operations aimed at regime change.

Zimbabwe’s government should be concerned about the activities of diplomats operating within their country whose home countries have imposed sanctions and taken an extremely hostile posture towards Zimbabwe’s leaders.

The West must respect Zimbabwe’s internal processes

Those seeking to uphold the right of oppressed and formerly oppressed nations to self-determination, independent nationhood and sovereignty, must respect the inherent desire on the part of the Zimbabwe people to conduct their elections under the guidance of the laws of the state.

The U.S. government refused any diplomatic interference, even from countries considered allies, when the U.S. disqualified hundreds of thousands of African Americans from voting in Florida in 2000 and in Ohio in 2004.

In 2005, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when hundreds of thousands of

mostly African-American people were forcefully evacuated from the U.S. Gulf region, the Bush administration denied offers from Cuba, Venezuela and other countries to provide direct assistance to the evacuees.

In Zimbabwe’s case, where the anti-government propaganda is so intense in Western circles, those who seek to uphold in principle the right to self-determination can only support the ruling party’s ability to defend the sovereignty and independence of that nation. □

PAKISTAN

Struggle for rights focuses on missing persons

From all parts of Pakistan society, people demonstrated June 3 in Rawalpindi, called together by the Campaign for Missing Persons. The Asian Human Rights Commission identified 52 illegal torture and detention centers in Pakistan under the Pervez Musharraf regime “where missing persons are held for long periods of time in order to force them to confess” that they were involved “in terrorist and sabotage activities. The information about the places of illegal detention was collected from the persons who were detained in these centers for several years after arrest. Their whereabouts were never made known to their family members.”

Lawyers, who had begun the movement last year to reinstate anti-Musharraf Supreme Court Judge Chowdary, rallied June 9 against the president. They burned Musharraf in effigy and called for his removal. That the struggle against the regime is growing rapidly could be seen when 250,000 ex-officers of the Pakistan military demanded that Musharraf be put on trial and receive the death penalty.

—John Catalinotto

Koreans protest U.S. free trade agreement

About 125 members of Nodutdol, the Korean Democratic Labor Party, the International Action Center and others held a demonstration and candlelight vigil June 7 in the heart of New York City’s Koreatown at 32nd Street and Sixth Avenue. The demonstrators opposed the U.S.-South Korean Free Trade Agreement and U.S. imports of beef to South Korea and threw a spotlight on the severe repression anti-FTA protesters have suffered at the hands of South Korean riot cops. Korean protesters, including many women, have been beaten down, gassed and hosed down with water cannons in cop riots in recent weeks in Seoul, the capital. The demonstration showed that New

York’s Koreans are united around the demands to respect Korean sovereignty, respect peaceful protest in the Republic of Korea as well as the U.S., and to oppose police brutality.

Nodutdol’s statement said, “We at Nodutdol support the efforts of the organizers of Saturday’s vigil. We hope that this vigil and other follow-up actions will contribute to a growing broad-based movement here in the United States that opposes the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. We also support the Korean people’s right to protest oppressive government policies that affect their daily lives and well-being.”

—Eric Struch

as republic is declared

Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Center-Masal). Prachanda, who led the CPN-M through ten years of people’s war and to victory in the CA elections, will likely retain his top leadership post in the new party, which will go simply by the name Communist Party of Nepal.

The latest merger follows a string of other similar mergers between the CPN-M and several smaller, revolutionary workers’ parties. This strengthens the hand of the revolutionary forces in Nepal, which were somewhat divided during the 10 years of people’s war. A stronger and more unified revolutionary party in Nepal is necessary to carry out the fundamental reforms the masses desperately need and to address the deep inequalities that have resulted from 237 years of rule by feudal forces in collaboration with foreign capital.

Nepal’s masses continue to live in

deplorable conditions. Only 10 percent of the country has access to electric power. More than 85 percent lack running water and basic sanitation, and malnutrition is rampant among children.

Despite a history of failure to deliver fundamental reforms by Nepal’s traditional parties, the revolutionary forces inside Nepal today are in a unique position to radically alter the political and social landscape.

After 10 years of armed struggle, and years of street protests, the revolutionary forces in Nepal have secured victory in the CA elections, abolished the monarchy and established a federal democratic republic. In this context a united and principled communist party will have the opportunity to carry out fundamental reforms such as land redistribution, electrification of the country and mass literacy campaigns. □



Under the radar

Everyone is aware of the U.S. occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Many are aware of U.S. intervention—military and otherwise—in Pakistan, throughout Latin America and increasingly in Africa. However, the ever more aggressive role of the Pentagon and NATO in Eastern Europe and the former USSR usually passes under most people’s radar.

For three weeks, two anti-war Czechs went on a hunger strike to protest that government’s plans to let the U.S. build an exceedingly dangerous “anti-missile” base right in Central Europe. Jan Tamáš and Jan Bednář—whose liver failure had put his life in danger—ended their action June 2, but their struggle has grown. By the time they went off their hunger strike, others had joined them in hunger strikes in Australia, Italy, the United Sates, Spain and Germany as well as in the Czech Republic.

Well might they protest. U.S. imperialism wants to make Czech territory house radar that is part of an anti-missile shield, allegedly against rockets launched from the Middle East. This 21st-century “Star Wars” scheme gives the Pentagon an advantage in a first strike against Russia, so the Russian government has complained bitterly about the project.

The Czech population, understandably, in its large majority doesn’t want to live under the radar. But the right-wing regime, which has to depend on

Washington and the Pentagon because of its anti-worker policies, is trying to close the deal with the U.S. and turn Czechs into imperialist pawns.

The U.S.-Czech radar base has slipped under the radar here, since both Democratic and Republican parties support NATO and U.S. imperialist expansion in that region of the world, since the media work hand-in-glove with the Pentagon, and since they all believe this piecemeal aggression is working smoothly for U.S. imperialism.

However, anger is rising at the huge expense of predatory military programs. In Poland, too, where the missiles themselves are to be deployed, popular indignation is rising, as well as the fear this will turn the country into a legitimate target. And so the Pentagon thinks the best defense of this boondoggle for the military-industrial complex is to keep it low profile.

We wish Jan Tamáš and Jan Bednář well and thank them for making the sacrifice that brings another area of U.S. imperialist aggression to the attention of the world.

Anyone who would like to sign a petition against the bases or find out more about the struggle to stop them, see BasesOutNow.org, a Web site of an organization in the U.S. in solidarity with the worldwide struggle to stop these bases.

Cynthia McKinney’s statement on Obama nomination

The following excerpts are from a statement issued by Cynthia McKinney, Power to the People candidate for U.S. president, on June 9, 2008. Go to www.workers.org to read the entire statement.

On June 7, Hillary Clinton announced that her 2008 presidential bid is over, making Barack Obama the first-ever Black presidential nominee of a major party in the history of the United States.

Congratulations to Sen. Obama for achieving such a feat!

Many of us never thought we would see in our lifetime a Black person with a real possibility of becoming president of the U.S.

The fact that this is now possible is a sign of some racial progress in this country, more than 40 years after the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. But it is also a sign of the deep discontent among the American people, and particularly among African Americans, with the corporate-dominated, business-as-usual politics that has prevailed in Washington for too many years.

Coming from Barack Obama, the word “change” did not appear as just another empty campaign slogan. It galvanized millions of people—mostly young people—to register to vote and to get active in the political system.

Across a broad swath of the people of this country, and from those who are impacted by U.S. foreign policy, there is a real expectation, a real desire, for change.

While congratulating Sen. Obama, a few of the issues must be addressed for the change needed in this country to be real. United for a Fair Economy

(UFE) has found that on some indices the racial disparities that exist today are worse than at the time of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; for example, infant mortality, where the overall U.S. world ranking falls below Cuba, Israel and Canada. Without a public policy intervention, it would take over 5,000 years to close the home ownership gap between Blacks and whites in this country, especially exacerbated because of the foreclosure crisis disproportionately facing Blacks and Latinos today.

They have found that it would take 581 years, without a public policy intervention, to close the racial gap in income in this country.

In a study not too long ago, Dr. David Satcher found that over 83,000 Blacks died unnecessarily, due to racial disparities in access to health care and because of the disparate treatment blacks receive after access.

The United Nations has already cited its concern for the treatment of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita survivors and the extrajudicial killings taking place across our country, that especially target Black and Latino males, and especially at the hands of law enforcement authorities.

WE SAY NO The truth on military recruiters & the draft A Guide to Resistance

This book is aimed at increasing recruiting problems by helping young people and their parents counter the lies of the recruiters.

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U.S. behind Israel’s war threats on Iran

By Sara Flounders

The danger of a U.S. attack on Iran, either directly by the Pentagon or through Israel, was made more explicit in the first week of June.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was in Washington to say that Iran’s nuclear program must be stopped by “all possible means.” He and a host of U.S. politicians addressed a convention of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). The presidential contenders from both imperialist parties as well as senators on top congressional committees all repeated the same theme. Democrats and Republicans seemed united as they lined up to express unequivocal support for Israel and to threaten Iran, presenting its totally legal development of nuclear energy as a dire threat to “world peace.”

This well-coordinated threat escalated after Olmert returned to Israel from the convention. Within hours of his return, Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz called war against Iran “unavoidable.” Mofaz, a former military chief and defense minister, has been Israel’s representative in a strategic dialogue on Iran with U.S. officials. He said that if Iran continues its nuclear program, Israel will attack because it has no choice as “options are disappearing and sanctions have proven to be ineffective.”

An international media uproar began over the provocative and threatening

statement. The price of oil shot up to an unprecedented \$138 a barrel. Prime Minister Olmert then fanned the flames and refused to discount the possibility of a military strike against Iran. “All options, including the military option, must remain on the table,” he said, echoing Bush.

This only confirmed that Israel is a tool of U.S. policy, especially when U.S. administrations are not in a position to take action directly.

Many times Washington has given its full military, political, economic and military support for Israel’s crimes: during Israel’s repeated wars to push back the rising tide of Arab nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s; its 1981 bombing of an Iraqi nuclear reactor; its training of death squads in Central America during the 1980s; its support for South African apartheid; its 2006 bombing of Lebanon, and its recent strike on Syria.

AIPAC serves U.S. corporate power

AIPAC has grown into a powerful lobby because it has always promoted policies that benefit the profit interests of the most powerful section of U.S. corporate power—the military and oil industries. It works in tandem with them. Time and again giant U.S. military industries have used AIPAC to influence policy inside the U.S. The Zionist group was one of a whole constellation of forces that pushed for the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Israel is totally tied to and dependent on the Pentagon. During 60 years, billions of dollars have gone in U.S. aid to Israel—mostly to buy U.S. weapons systems, jet aircraft, tanks, etc. This in turn fuels and justifies a new round of weapons purchases by U.S.-dependent Arab regimes.

Corporations like Lockheed Martin, General Electric Co., Northrop Grumman and Boeing are more than willing to give millions of dollars to military lobbyists and to AIPAC. They in turn give generous donations to politicians, Republican and Democrat alike, to secure multi-billion dollar weapons contracts and agitate for military strikes, expanding bases and endless wars.

Division in U.S. ruling class

Faced with the debacle of the U.S. occupations in both Iraq and Afghanistan, there is deep division within U.S. ruling circles and even within the top Pentagon brass on how and whether to proceed with an attack on Iran. This opposition is not based on any humanitarian concerns for the Iranian people, their own troops or working people in the U.S. It is based on the fear of a political explosion in the region.

Indecision and growing contention are the order of the day. The past two years have been full of leaks, in-depth exposés by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker magazine and resignations of both civilian and military officials. Admiral William J. Fallon, head of the U.S. Central Command for the Middle East and South and Central Asia, was forced to resign after Esquire magazine wrote about his deep reservations regarding an attack on Iran.

A London paper reported over a year ago that some of the Pentagon’s most senior military commanders were prepared to resign if the White House ordered a military strike on Iran. (Sunday Times, Feb. 25, 2007)

The steamroller against Iran was set

back by the release of a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate last December saying Iran did not have a nuclear weapons program and had not had one in more than five years.

The most recent top-level shakeup involved the forced resignations of Air Force Secretary Michael Wayne and Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Mosley, purportedly over a “chain of failure” in the Air Force’s handling of U.S. nuclear weapons. Four crucial components of nuclear weapons were reportedly shipped by “mistake” to Taiwan. A B-52 bomber “mistakenly” armed with six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles flew across the U.S. Both “mistakes” had been known for over a year. Does the shakeup have any connection to the rift over Iran?

Reports that the Bush administration plans to launch an air strike against Iran within the next two months continued in the May 28 Asia Times On-Line.

According to the article, two key U.S. senators briefed on the attack, Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California and Senator Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana, plan to go public with their opposition to the move. But their projected New York Times op-ed piece has yet to appear.

Meanwhile former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer wrote in the Israeli daily Haaretz of June 1 that Bush and Olmert seem to be planning to end Iran’s nuclear program “by military, rather than by diplomatic means.” Fischer fears the Middle East is drifting towards a new, dangerous military conflict.

Iran’s right to nuclear energy

Iran’s envoy to the U.N., Mohammad Khazaee, lodged a protest with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council over Israel’s threats. Khazaee made the point that such a dangerous threat against a sovereign state and a member of the United Nations constitutes a violation of international law, contravenes the most fundamental principles of the U.N. Charter, and requires a resolute and clear response, particularly from the Security Council.

Iran has the right under international law to develop nuclear energy. It is a signer of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The International Atomic Energy Agency has made numerous inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities.

Israel, however, has never signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has refused any inspections of its widely known nuclear weapons program with more than 200 nuclear warheads.

The U.S. government has developed a whole new generation of tactical nuclear weapons, which also violates the agreements and treaties attempting to limit and restrict nuclear weapons.

Today the U.S. ruling class is realizing with rising panic that it is not in control of events. Events are controlling them—from the deepening and unsolvable economic crisis to an unwinnable war. This tends to make these global predators increasingly desperate, riddled with divisions, and prone to ever more desperate military adventures.

The only real opposition to the growing danger of a new war will come from the grassroots, not from the politicians. Such forces on a global basis must take seriously the increasing push for war and begin to mobilize. □

INTERNATIONAL WORKER BRIEFS

ROMANIA

Workers win against Renault

Romania joined the European Union on January 1, 2007. According to Petru Dandea, vice-president of the union federation Cartel ALFA, this produced “prices aligned to the European market, which meant a strong increase in the cost of living. That’s the reason for the current wave of job actions.” (Le Monde Diplomatique, June 2008)

The first union reaction to this assault on living standards was a joint struggle over the minimum wage, which is the second lowest in the EU. They managed to get a raise from 107 euros (currently \$160) a month to 137 euros (currently \$205).

A strike wave in late April/early May has included a strike by autoworkers against a subsidiary of Renault, a French-based multinational. The autoworkers at the Dacia plant felt they needed a significant hike since they make, on average, about \$600 a month. Their plant produces 235,000 vehicles a year and is Renault’s most profitable.

Syndicat Automobile Dacia (SAD), the union representing the workers, started out negotiations by asking for a 70 percent wage hike to handle the attacks on their living standards. Renault threatened to move production to Morocco or the Ukraine, two countries with lower wages than Romania.

Petru Dandea explained why the workers didn’t take this threat seriously. “Renault has invested more than \$1.5 billion in Romania and can’t pull out the day after tomorrow. Besides the investment in equipment, the cost of training workers is very high: to leave Romania would cost a tremendous amount.”

Romanian Prime Minister Calin Tariceanu told the French newspaper Liberation in April 2008, after the strike had begun, that there were more than 200,000 autoworkers in Romania, that its auto industry did about \$24 billion in business, and that Romania was intent on strengthening it.

Renault went into court to try to get the strike declared illegal but lost.

This legal victory opened a flood of solidarity. The post office union gave \$16,000 to make up for the autoworkers’ lost wages. One union confederation gave nearly \$5,000.

The unions that represent Renault workers in France, in a rare but not totally unheard-of act, gave SAD \$18,000.

After three weeks of sharp losses and facing a union that had taken to the streets and was gathering support both domestically and internationally, Renault improved its offer. Nicolae Pavelescu, the leader of SAD, announced that 70 percent of the workers had accepted it and suspended the strike.

The settlement amounts to a 23 percent raise, with most of it backdated to Jan. 1 and some postponed to September; in addition, increased and guaranteed bonuses will be paid at Christmas and Easter.

Steelworkers also struck against ArcelorMittal, a subsidiary of Arcelor—the largest steel company in the world. Their strike also ended with a solid victory.

The inflation that is raging in Romania, and the rest of Europe, is likely to produce more and larger struggles, especially as the European bourgeoisie attempts to make workers pay for the bankers’ mistakes. Since Eastern Europe is far poorer and has been an El Dorado for the international bourgeoisie, the struggles there will be sharper.

—G. Dunkel

CANADA

Autoworkers blockade GM

General Motors announced June 3 the previously-mentioned closing of four North American truck assembly plants, in Moraine, Ohio; Janesville, Wis.; Oshawa, Ontario; and Toluca, Mexico. United Auto Workers President Ron Gettelfinger has said, basically, that the only thing for union members to do is to wait for the economy to improve.

North of the U.S. border, workers have a different view. Since June 4, thousands of workers have joined Canadian Auto Workers Local 222, which represents the workers in the Oshawa truck plant, in a blockade of GM’s Canadian headquarters in Oshawa. Since GM agreed to keep the 2,600-worker plant open in a recently signed contract between the CAW and GM, CAW President Buzz Hargrove has termed the threatened closing illegal.

“What I can guarantee, and I said this to General Motors about an hour ago on the highway, they want their building back and they’re not getting their building back,” stated Local 222 President Chris Buckley to a crowd of union supporters June 6. (cbcnews.ca, June 6)

At a rally of thousands the following day, Buckley boasted of the worldwide attention the blockade has drawn. Those pledging all-out support include Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, and International Metalworkers Federation General Secretary Marcello Malentacchi, speaking for 120 million metalworkers around the world.

The union has, thus far, shown no signs of retreating and has announced “phase four” of the struggle, a solidarity march June 12 through the streets of Oshawa. As the CAW states on its Web site, “Fighting back makes a difference.” (caw.ca)

—Martha Grevatt

PAKISTAN

Textile workers resist mill closure

Along with the tumultuous political struggle against the repressive acts of U.S.-backed President Pervez Musharraf that have shaken Pakistan, a class struggle has broken out between thousands of workers and the owners of the Shahdadt Textile Mills, following the permanent layoffs of more than 400 workers on May 1.

The mills were a major complex in a relatively small city in Pakistan, whose construction began in the 1970s under the first Peoples Party of Pakistan government, and which at its peak employed 6,000 workers. The Musharraf regime denationalized the mills and they were eventually sold at a low price to a local capitalist, who had planned to dismantle it for machinery and scrap.

On June 5, workers, led by their union leaders, pitched tents at the main gate of the mills to block the movement of machinery. Workers stopped two trailer trucks from moving the equipment before the workers were paid back pay. They raised slogans, in the presence of police, demanding payment and the reopening of the plant.

—John Catalinotto

PORTUGUAL

Protest anti-worker policies

Workers in Portugal came out in massive numbers on June 5, as they have so many times in the past two years, to protest the government policies that eliminate guarantees for workers’ rights won in the country’s constitution following the anti-fascist revolution of 1974. According to the labor confederation that called the action, the CGTP-IN, some 250,000 workers, in a country of 10 million people, marched down Freedom Avenue in Lisbon for three hours against the new Labor Code the government wants to impose on them.

The changes to the Labor Code and labor legislation governing public employees would open the road to a reduction of wages and benefits, deregulate work hours, make it easier for bosses to fire workers without cause, legitimize work insecurity and strengthen the ability of the bosses to take arbitrary actions.

Although the name of the governing party is the Socialist Party, it has been carrying out a neoliberal, anti-worker program. The only major party in Parliament that has consistently defended workers rights is the Portuguese Communist Party.

According to the editors of the progressive Web magazine O Diario (odiario.info), “The June 5 demonstration signals a radicalization of the struggle of the Portuguese people against the right-wing policies developed by the most reactionary government that the country has known since the 25 of April,” 1974, the day of the Portuguese revolution.

“This combat-readiness in defense of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic remained apparent in the spirit of the great day of struggle, in the confidence of the masses, in the atmosphere of fraternity that characterized it. Slogans that hadn’t been heard in a long time were taken up in a loud and united voice, reminding the government that the people united cannot be defeated.”

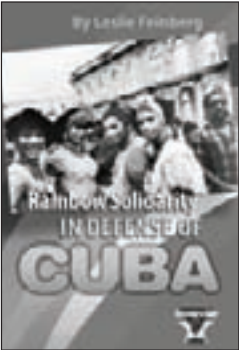
—John Catalinotto

Rainbow Solidarity
In Defense
of CUBA

This soon-to-be published work, a compilation of 25 articles from the Lavender & Red series in Workers World newspaper, shows how the Cuban Revolution has worked to overturn prejudice against same-sex love inherited from the colonial and imperial eras. The book shows the Cuban Revolution’s trajectory of progress in hard facts. It’s a must-read to understand the revolutionary process required to uproot prejudice.

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Nueva Flota Estadounidense amenaza soberanía Latinoamericana

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

La Marina de los Estados Unidos anunció el 24 de abril el regreso de la Cuarta Flota al Caribe y Centro y Sur América, cubriendo 30 países de la región. La flota había operado en esa región en 1943, cuando mantenía vigilancia contra los submarinos alemanes durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial pero fue desmantelada en 1950.

En un comunicado de prensa titulado “La Marina Restablece Cuarta Flota Estadounidense” (defenselink.mil), el Pentágono trató de suavizar la apariencia de esta agresiva movida diciendo que “[la flota] conducirá diferentes misiones incluyendo varias operaciones de contingencia, contra narcoterrorismo y actividades cooperativas de seguridad. Estas actividades incluyen acciones de ejército a ejército y oportunidades de entrenamiento bilateral además de asistencia humanitaria y colaboración en los países”.

La flota será el componente marino del Comando Sur (USSOUTHCOM) y estará basada en Florida. Las nuevas operaciones están programadas para comenzar el 1º de julio.

Venezuela es un factor importante

Es de interés notar, aunque brevemente, el origen de la Cuarta Flota. En un detallado artículo del 27 de mayo en la revista CounterPunch titulado “Cuarta Flota de EEUU en Aguas Venezolanas”, Nikolas Kozloff describe cómo a principios de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, Venezuela era el principal país exportador de petróleo en el mundo. “Durante el conflicto, los campos ricos en petróleo de Maracaibo, localizados en el extremo oeste del estado venezolano de Zulia, eran considerados un recurso crucial tanto para las potencia enemigas como para las aliadas”.

El artículo describe la cesación eventual del comercio de petróleo venezolano con los alemanes y su alianza con los Estados Unidos. Los alemanes respondieron con la destrucción de más de dos docenas de tanques petroleros en los mares del Caribe al norte de Venezuela y atacando una refinería petrolera en la isla de Aruba. Estos incidentes llevaron a la formación de la Cuarta Flota—básicamente para defender los intereses petroleros de Estados Unidos en Venezuela.

Una declaración virtual de guerra

Si no fuera porque es un asunto muy grave, se podría reír cuando se le llama a esta maniobra “asistencia humanitaria”. ¿Cómo la de Afganistán e Irak? Una mirada a los componentes de esta flota enfría la sangre.

Es una ciudad flotante. Esta armada es más grande que el total de las fuerzas militares de muchos de los países latinoamericanos y caribeños que rodeará. Contiene el portaaviones de propulsión nuclear más grande y poderoso, el USS George Washington, el cual puede llevar hasta 90 de los más ultra rápidos y modernos aviones, como los infames aviones de combate F-16 y F-18. También integra el grupo, bombarderos invisibles, helicópte-

ros, fragatas de guerra y submarinos. No puede haber ninguna ilusión. La reconstrucción de esta flota es una preparación para amenazar con guerra a los pueblos de la región.

Más y más Estados Unidos se está quedando aislado en Latinoamérica. Excepto sus más cercanos colaboradores en la región, Colombia y Perú, la mayoría de los países no quieren más bases estadounidenses o desplazamientos militares en sus territorios, a pesar de que mantengan comercio y diplomacia con Estados Unidos. Un ejemplo es la base estadounidense de Manta en Ecuador. Esta será cerrada por orden del Presidente Rafael Correa cuando el contrato expire en el 2009. Por eso no sorprende que el Pentágono busque adoptar un escenario más “flexible” en el mar.

Este aislamiento refleja un proceso en América Latina y el Caribe que disgusta al imperialismo estadounidense. La mayoría de estos países, forzados en muchos casos por el levantamiento de las masas populares, está tratando de alejarse de la esfera de dominio de Estados Unidos. Y esto también incluye el área más importante, la del dominio financiero.

Resuenan ideas de integración regional

Los países al sur del Río Bravo tienen diferencias políticas entre sí.

Algunos están pasando por procesos revolucionarios, como en Cuba y Venezuela, donde la meta final es la de deshacerse del capitalismo y cambiar las relaciones entre las clases sociales para reconstruir el país sobre una base socialista.

Otros como Argentina, Brasil, y Chile, entre otros, solo quieren reformas y están dejando intacto el modo de producción capitalista mientras intentan implementar programas progresistas para el beneficio de l@s pobres.

Otros como Bolivia, Ecuador y Nicaragua, están comenzando a mirar hacia el socialismo como la única forma de desarrollo. Los primeros dos están intentando retomar el control de sus recursos naturales por medio de nacionalizaciones.

Pero hasta muchos de los que solo quieren reformas están alejándose de la dominación financiera del imperialismo de los EEUU, representado por el Banco Mundial y el Fondo Monetario Internacional. Brasil y Argentina, por ejemplo, pagaron su deuda enorme al FMI para terminar su relación de dependencia con el buitre financiero. En 2006 Bolivia también rompió su relación con el FMI.

Muchos países en América Latina están expandiendo sus mercados. Mientras que en el pasado reciente comerciaron principalmente con los EEUU y Europa, ahora están comerciando más y más con China y muy significativamente, entre ellos mismos. Las ideas de integración y cooperación regional propuestas por Cuba y Venezuela se están aceptando cada vez más.

Cuba y Venezuela, junto a Bolivia, Nicaragua y Dominica, son miembros de la Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas (ALBA), que es un tremendo

esfuerzo de intercambio y cooperación en todas las esferas —educación, cultura, deportes, salud, finanzas, energía, desarrollo de infraestructura, y muchas otras áreas más. Tiene la última finalidad de unir a toda la región según la idea de “la Patria Grande” de Simón Bolívar.

Las propuestas del ALBA incluyen programas para el desarrollo de la energía como Petrocaribe y Petrosur y muy crucialmente, el Banco del Sur. Este banco es un intento de remplazar el BM y el FMI con una entidad latinoamericana que beneficie a todos los pueblos del Sur y operaría no como un organismo impulsado por el afán de ganancias sino como una organización financiera que va a considerar la situación económica de cada país.

Muchos esfuerzos están siendo conducidos para estimular la cooperación y la solidaridad. Uno de ellos fue la cumbre de urgencia en Nicaragua el 7 de mayo bajo el tema “Soberanía y Seguridad Alimentaria: Alimentos para la Vida”, para bregar con la crisis alimentaria en la región. A esta, quince países asistieron.

Además del ALBA, UNASUR (Unión de Naciones Suramericanas) una organización más grande y reciente fue constituida formalmente el 23 de mayo en Brasilia, la capital de Brasil. Doce países suramericanos firmaron el documento final que tiene como objetivo la eliminación de la pobreza, la defensa de la biodiversidad, la integración y la cooperación. Tomando en consideración las diferencias de cada país, se adherirán al tratado según permitan sus condiciones.

Estas cumbres de trabajo y propuestas están en directa competición con la meta de los EEUU de controlar a la región. La desesperación de Washington puede ser notada en el incremento de su agresión hacia al Sur.

Estrategia de los EEUU, secesión: Bolivia

La Cuarta Flota es solo la acción más reciente en contra del esfuerzo latinoamericano de aspirar a su independencia y soberanía. Otras tácticas son: el estímulo de la formación de movimientos secesionistas, fortalecimiento de la oposición, el trabajo por medio de gobiernos aliados y otras operaciones militares, como el Plan Colombia.

La secesión en sí no es un hecho negativo si surge de la lucha de las masas oprimidas para liberarse de un opresor. Sin embargo, la táctica de secesión utilizada por los Estados Unidos es totalmente lo contrario. Está promoviendo la secesión en algunos países para fortalecer a la oligarquía arraigada y separar una región rica en perjuicio de la mayoría pobre de la nación, desestabilizando así lo que Estados Unidos percibe ser un “país o régimen enemigo”. Están tratando de usar esta estrategia en Ecuador, Venezuela y Bolivia.

En Venezuela el blanco es la región del Zulia, la parte del país rica en petróleo al noroeste que fue el motivo principal para la creación de la Cuarta Flota durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Ahora una vez más, esa misma flota puede ser una amenaza que ayude a la secesión de esa parte

rica de Venezuela. Sin embargo, esta vez, el petróleo de Venezuela pertenece al pueblo y él junto al liderazgo del Presidente Hugo Chávez, ha prometido defenderlo.

Bolivia, sin embargo, está en gran peligro. El movimiento secesionista allá, totalmente fascista, ha sido muy violento en contra de la mayoría campesina e indígena. La Media Luna, una región que abarca las provincias más ricas del país, Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando y Tarija, ha amenazando con secesión del resto de país al gobierno nacional progresista de Evo Morales. Es un ataque contra los programas de Morales de nacionalizar los hidrocarburos y el petróleo, de establecer programas para l@s pobres, y de reconocer los derechos de las naciones indígenas dentro de Bolivia.

Aunque esta clase de referéndums separatistas son ilegales bajo la Constitución, la cual también prohíbe la instalación de bases militares extranjeras (estadounidenses) en Bolivia, estas provincias de todos modos han actuado para llevarlos a cabo. Santa Cruz tuvo su propio referéndum el 5 de mayo. Aunque las abstenciones, los votos en blanco, y los votos por el “No” llegaron al 50 por ciento, los medios de difusión de la oligarquía engañosamente anunciaron que el 80 por ciento había votado por el “Sí”.

El 1º de junio las provincias de Beni y Pando tuvieron sus referéndums. Otra vez, un nivel significativo de abstención fue reportado en las dos provincias, pero los separatistas anunciaron una victoria. Tarija tendrá su referéndum el 22 de junio.

El papel del gobierno estadounidense en todo eso es crucial. La Unión Cívica de Santa Cruz, encabezada por un hombre de negocios croata, Branko Marinkovic, es la organización principal detrás del movimiento secesionista. Está aliada a un grupo viciosamente racista y violento que se llama la Unión Juvenil Cruceña. Estos grupos van de provincia a provincia estimulando el odio contra la población indígena y contra Morales en preparación para los referéndums. Su propaganda recibe apoyo financiero de la Agencia Estadounidense para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID), un instrumento de la CIA.

De interés es el hecho que el embajador estadounidense a Bolivia es Philip Goldberg, un diplomático que fomentó la secesión de Kosovo en Yugoslavia. En febrero, según Prensa Latina, el Canciller boliviano David Choquehuanca, dijo que la Embajada Estadounidense tenía que explicar porqué estaba financiando a la “Organización de Estudios Policiacos”, previamente conocida como “Comandancia de Operaciones Especiales” — una agencia de inteligencia comprometida con promulgar campañas de desestabilización. Otras organizaciones semejantes conectadas con la Embajada Estadounidense estaban siendo investigadas por espionaje y conspiración.

Muchas de estas organizaciones ya han sido disueltas.

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Próximo: Otras estrategias de agresión: Colombia como el mejor aliado de Washington.